



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

**Animal and  
Plant Health  
Inspection  
Service**

FY 2002



## WILDLIFE SERVICES—WEST VIRGINIA

*Contact Information:*

*William R. Bonwell, West Virginia Wildlife Services State Director*

*730 Yokum Street,*

*Elkins, WV 26241*

*Phone: (304) 636-1785 FAX: (304) 636-5397*

*Toll-Free Number 1-866-4USDAWS 1-866-487-3297*

*E-mail: [william.r.bonwell@aphis.usda.gov](mailto:william.r.bonwell@aphis.usda.gov)*

*Web site: [www.aphis.usda.gov/ws](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ws)*

### USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in West Virginia

Every day, residents, industries, organizations, and agencies call on West Virginia Wildlife Services (WS) for expertise in protecting agriculture, property, natural resources, and human health and safety from damage or threats posed by wildlife. Managed by professional wildlife biologists, WS responds with effective, selective, and humane strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts.

West Virginia is a diverse mix of urban and suburban settings, agricultural lands, and extensive forested environments with the Appalachian Mountains dominating the eastern portion of the State. This ecological and geographic diversity creates a habitat that allows for a remarkably wide range of wildlife species. With over 1.8 million residents, human interactions with wildlife are common.

WS biologists work to reduce public safety risks and property damage by identifying dangerous wildlife hazards at airports; protecting humans, domestic pets and livestock from rabies; and helping West Virginia's livestock and crop producers reduce losses from predators and birds. WS biologists also protect human health and safety and property by managing large flocks of roosting birds at West Virginia's industrial sites.



#### Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting livestock from coyotes and vultures
- Protecting public health from wildlife borne diseases
- Protecting passengers and aircraft from collisions with wildlife
- Protecting public health from diseases associated with large flocks of roosting blackbirds in urban and suburban environments and at industrial sites
- Protecting livestock and wildlife from diseases

#### Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to West Virginia:

- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Managing coyote predation through reproductive intervention
- Managing predators through new methods to protect livestock and wildlife
- Controlling wildlife vectors of rabies and bovine tuberculosis
- Protecting timber and forest resources



### Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS offers information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable many people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this *technical assistance* can be provided over the phone. WS also provides on-site expertise, or *direct assistance*, to manage complex wildlife problems that cannot be safely resolved by others. To support this effort, WS conducts *scientific research* across the Nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology.

**Protecting Livestock from Predators**—In addition to the many factors that cause economic losses for livestock producers, predators like the coyote cause significant losses at some farms by attacking sheep, cattle, and goats. A West Virginia University Cooperative Extension Service survey indicated that during the 1994-1995 season, shepherds lost 4,630 lambs and ewes to coyote predation. On a percentage basis, sheep numbers are currently declining at a higher rate than at any other time in West Virginia's agricultural history. A 1999 National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) survey of livestock producers nationwide reported that coyotes were the leading predator of sheep and lambs, accounting for 62 percent of all predator losses. The Extension Service survey also found that 51 percent of West Virginia shepherds who left the sheep business did so because of sheep losses to predators.

WS provides integrated predation management services to livestock producers throughout West Virginia. During the first year of the program, WS helped reduce livestock losses to predators by 90 percent and more recently the program helped reduce livestock losses to predators by 94 percent.

**Protecting Human Health and Safety**—Rabies poses a serious threat to livestock, wildlife, pets, and public health. Raccoon rabies was virtually unknown prior to the 1950's. The disease appeared in West Virginia in 1977 and expanded throughout the east to form the most intensive rabies outbreak in the United States. More than 90 percent of reported rabies cases involve wild animals and more than 50 percent of all rabies cases reported each year in major U.S. metropolitan areas involve raccoons. Although human rabies deaths are rare, the estimated public health costs associated with rabies detection, prevention, and control have risen, exceeding \$300 million annually.

In cooperation with selected eastern States and Canada, West Virginia WS annually distributes between 750,000 and 1,000,000 oral rabies vaccination baits to immunize raccoons against rabies. The goal of the program is to stop the westward movement of the raccoon strain of the disease. The distribution of these baits in West Virginia will reduce the risk of raccoon rabies entering the Midwestern region of the United States, where it would increasingly threaten livestock, human populations, and other animals, and significantly raise control costs throughout the region. The continued distribution of oral rabies vaccines will not only reduce the incidence of rabies, but ultimately eliminate raccoon rabies in West Virginia, as well as in the entire eastern United States.

**Protecting Air Travel**—WS assists West Virginia airports whenever wildlife become a hazard to aircraft and passenger safety. Nearly 77 percent of West Virginia land is forested and every West Virginia airport is bordered by or very near forested lands that provide wildlife habitat. Federal Aviation Administration data indicate that West Virginia has one of the highest rates of aircraft/deer incidents.

WS is recognized internationally for its scientific expertise in reducing wildlife hazards to the aviation industry. WS' National Wildlife Research Center, conducts research to understand the nature of wildlife hazards at airports and develop management tools to reduce these hazards.

Applying this scientific expertise, WS provides direct assistance to West Virginia airports. This includes removing animals from areas that surround runways. WS also provides technical assistance to airports by conducting initial wildlife hazard consultations, developing wildlife hazard assessments and wildlife hazard management plans, and training airport personnel to reduce the risk of wildlife collisions with aircraft.



## Looking to the Future

While WS provides West Virginians with safe, effective, and humane assistance for dealing with wildlife conflicts, there is always a demand for more support. Limited resources require assistance to be prioritized based upon the most serious threats rather than providing a systematic and thorough evaluation of wildlife conflicts. Health and safety receive the highest priority, however, wildlife damage to property generates 49 percent of all requests for assistance. Rather than making much needed on-site evaluations of wildlife damage to property, WS is limited to making recommendations based upon telephone interviews.

WS has also received requests for the development of an integrated bird control program in the State. This would reduce consumption and contamination of animal feed by starlings and other birds at dairy barns, reduce consumption and destruction of fruit crops at orchards and vineyards, and reduce property damage and human health concerns associated with large flocks of roosting birds.

## West Virginia Wildlife Services Funding • • • • •

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators; such as producers; private individuals; businesses; and other Federal, State, and local government agencies who have a vested interest in the program. In most cases, these cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or they play a role in wildlife damage management.

